

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 413

SO 004 451

AUTHOR Troup, Alice
TITLE Applications of Anthropology in Urban Schools.
PUB DATE 72
NOTE 7p.
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; Comparative Analysis; Course Descriptions; Course Objectives; *Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Context; Cultural Differences; Ethnology; Secondary Grades; *Social Studies; Sociocultural Patterns; Urban Culture

ABSTRACT

Anthropology can make two major and complimentary contributions to the process of education: 1) provide basic concepts and methods which are uniquely able to help public school students understand the specialized, abstract, complex nature of their urban environment; and 2) apply concepts and methods through research in schools to identify and describe patterns of cultural transmission, social structure, institutional change, subcultural conflict. In an anthropology course, urban high school students are introduced to the definition of culture, an examination of culture integration and of anthropological objectivity (no superior or inferior cultures, only different cultures); concepts which assist them in comprehending to some degree the structure, the complexity, and the mechanics of their own culture. A second major goal of the high school anthropology curriculum is the development of academic skills (inquiry, critical, analytical) as they pertain to anthropology. Public school teachers, and social studies teachers in particular, all exposed to students with different subcultural backgrounds, need an awareness of anthropological concepts. Anthropologists can contribute significantly to teacher education and to the development of classroom materials, assuring assistance to teachers and students alike. (JMB)

2.1

6p

ED 066413

Applications of Anthropology in Urban Schools

Alice Troup

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPIN-
IONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY
REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDU-
CATION POSITION OR POLICY

Symposium on Anthropology and Urban Schools

Chicago, April, 1972

SP 004 451

As a teacher of high school anthropology in an urban school, and as a graduate student with an interest in approaching school studies from an anthropological viewpoint, I see two major, and complimentary, contributions of anthropology to the process of education. First, Anthropology can provide basic concepts and methods which are uniquely able to help public school students understand the specialized, abstract, complex nature of their urban environment. Second, anthropology concepts and methods can be applied through research in schools to identify and describe patterns of culture transmission, social structure, institutional change, subcultural conflict and the like.

My own school research, done in the school where I teach, but during a leave of absence, focused on patterns of student initiated change. The study described several kinds of attempts at change, identified conflict and non-conflict ridden patterns of change, and underscored the relevance of culture integration in even so small an organizational unit.

School studies are a very fertile area for many kinds of anthropological research, but my major focus today will be on anthropology and its applications to an urban high school curriculum. First, I will briefly describe my present teaching situation, and then I will outline some of the anthropological concepts and methods which I teach, and illustrate their relevance to high school students.

I teach in a large suburban Pittsburgh school district. Anthropology is one of the elective offerings within the Social Studies department, and has been operational for six years. The course is one semester in length and meets for four hours each week. The students who elect the course are a varied, but by no means random group. About half are students taking advanced placement courses, and, by contrast, approximately a sixth are students who have learning or discipline difficulties within the school. On the whole, the students who select this course manifest a greater than average interest in the social sciences, and most take at least one other elective within the department.

The anthropology course which I teach could broadly be termed an introductory course, and as such is eclectic in approach. Selected aspects of archaeology, physical anthropology and cultural anthropology are taught during the semester. The basic materials for the first nine weeks are those developed by the American Anthropology Association's Curriculum Study Project, under the direction of Malcolm Collier. A variety of case study materials are used for the remainder of the course.

Class sizes vary greatly, but the average is twenty-five students. Classes of this size allow for more discussion and more individualized and varied experiences than is generally true in an introductory course at the university level. Lecture type classes are rare, although ten to twenty minutes of a class hour are frequently devoted to teacher centered explaining, defining or introducing. Discussion is especially important, and about a quarter of the class time is strictly individual or group involvement--solving

archaeological dating problems, having read about dating techniques; constructing hypotheses on the basis of archaeology maps and site reports; attempting to place skulls in evolutionary sequence, having been given data relating to changes in teeth, skullcaps, mandible cresting etc.

The structure of a high school system provides both strengths and limitations for an introductory anthropology course. The strengths include the emphasis on the process of teaching, the relatively small class size, the motivation on the part of the students, and the opportunity for students to interact with, and learn from, each other. The limitations include the non-availability of expensive materials, the risk of establishing a course for which there are very few prepared teachers, and the somewhat more superficial level of intellectual involvement. I believe, however, that it is possible to provide sixteen and seventeen year old students with a valid, disciplined introduction to anthropology. Even more importantly, I believe that it is desirable to do so as it enables students to learn more about themselves, and the problem solving process.

We at the high school level are very specifically conscious of the need to equip students, who live and will live in complex urban environments, with a set of methodological tools and attitudes which will aid them in describing, analyzing, and hopefully in understanding and interpreting their environment, particularly their own and others behavior in that environment. This goal is by no means unique to an anthropology course at the high school level, but anthropological methods and concepts are uniquely able to assist students in understanding the structure of, and some of the behavior patterns within, our society.

For example, the anthropological concept of culture itself is a critical prerequisite for understanding how we come to be what we are. We begin with a mythical situation in which a baby is deserted on an island, and the child miraculously survives to adulthood. Students are then asked to describe the life style of this individual. It becomes rapidly apparent that the child would have no language, no name, no religion, no meal patterns, no cooked food, no perception of male-female, probably no technology, no kinship, no political system, no religion, no morality...and that in fact, survival would be impossible. Thus we begin our definition of culture as a system of: fulfilling biological survival needs; fulfilling emotional needs; learned, transgenerational behaviors; shared behaviors; accumulated knowledge; defining perceptions of reality etc.

Beyond defining and identifying the culture concept, we select specific portions of the definition for examination in greater depth. For example, can one really "do his own thing", or are the limits of "doing your own thing" prescribed by culture? How much behavior--or what kinds of behaviors--must be shared by members of the culture if it is to survive? Culture by our definition must meet biological survival needs...but can it also endanger survival, as for example air pollution or atomic radiation? How do schools

function, explicitly and implicitly, as transmitters of culture? Culture must provide for the emotional stability and well being of its members. Does our society consistently provide an environment conducive to emotional stability? What about the family system and the impact of increasingly weaker family ties? Are contemporary communal systems pseudo-families, and if so, why are they being created? How does our culture's system of earning friends, position and the like contrast with the allocation patterns of other cultures? Does our "earning" system place too much stress on individuals? How is our culture contributing to the increasing rate of mental illness?

All of these questions stem originally from our definition of culture, and all of them provide an opportunity for meaningful involvement. Some of the questions we would examine together, others would be selected by students for their own research projects.

An important offshoot of the culture concept is culture integration. Culture integration is necessary for an understanding of the ramifications of even seemingly minor culture changes. We begin with Linton's study of the dramatic transformation of Tanalan society following the introduction of wet rice. The original dry rice Tanala, a relatively mobile, non-authoritarian, non-property-centered society, became, within a twenty year period, a predominantly settled, agricultural society, with elaborately constructed irrigation and defense systems, and equally elaborate class and kingship structures. Moving from a less complex culture to our own, in class we would attempt to identify some of the ramifications of change in our own culture. The introduction of the automobile, for instance, is readily identified as a change which greatly altered not only transportation patterns, but morality, religion, recreation, social and family patterns as well.

An example even closer to the experience of students is something they call the "establishment". Students are rather commonly irritated by establishment rigidity within the school. If encouraged to look at establishment policy in the light of culture integration, however, students are frequently amazed by the bewildering complex of school and community interests that come to bear on a particular decision. It soon becomes apparent that what they so simplistically termed the establishment, is by no means a readily definable or isolatable structure.

Besides concepts such as culture and culture integration, another and quite different concept is that of anthropological objectivity. A truism for anthropologists is the assertion that there are no superior or inferior cultures, only different cultures. This approach to understanding other cultures is fundamental if we expect students to look at other cultures, as well as our own subcultures, in more productive, more objective, and less judgemental ways. Our culture, with its technological advancement and luxurious living standard is easily perceived as a ruler by which other cultures are measured. Such a ruler, of course, implies an obvious superiority in regard to our own culture. By using ethnographic materials, however, to supply other kinds of rulers--cultural longevity, secure family relationships, concern for the environment, the care of the young, the treatment of the old--it becomes apparent

that our own culture is not as perfect as it seemed, nor can other cultures be so easily written off as unfortunate, ignorant, anachronisms.

In the course which I teach, an attempt is made to provide conceptual tools from the discipline of anthropology which will assist students in comprehending to some degree, the structure, the complexity, and the mechanics of their own culture. I have given three specific examples of such conceptual tools, and there are, of course, many more--status and role, race and racism, culture continuity, diffusion and acculturation--to name just a few. I will move at this point, however, to a discussion of a second major goal of the high school anthropology curriculum--the development of academic skills as they pertain especially to anthropology.

Inquiry skills are obviously important to anthropology. Learning to identify and state problems, to form hypotheses, to do research, and to deal with abstract data are all important learning skills especially at the high school level. We may take the definition of "human" as an illustration of inquiry technique. At first this problem appears exceedingly simple to most students, as after all everybody knows what being human means. But how does one define it? Is it chromosome order and number? Is it arches in the feet and reduced brow ridges? Is it symbolic thought--and if so, what is ~~that~~? Is it language...or the ability to lie? Is it family organization... incest rules...ability to commit adultery? Is it tool use...tool making...abstract tool making? Is it prolonged youth? Is it emotional capacity, the ability to be loyal or to seek revenge? Is it being artistic or religious or romantic? Is it any or all of these things? Why? How? Who says so? On what basis? Evidence? Interpretation? Intuition? The definition of human, like evolution itself, is a process, and not a particularly well fined process in either case. The point, of course, is the questioning process, which is as critical as the ultimate conclusions.

In addition to inquiry skills, the development of critical skills must also be especially stressed at the high school level. In spite of popularly held beliefs, dinosaurs are not the first animal domesticated by man: Big Foot, lurking in the California hills, is not the proverbial missing link; New Guinea tribesmen are not devoid or incapable of morality. Students who have looked upon articles in National Geographic as ultimate informative sources, must be taught to identify the shortcomings of such materials. Students must also become aware of ethnocentrism, and the negative effect of ethnocentric materials. In my course, for example, we spend some time using legitimate ethnographic data to study the Kalahari Bushmen. Then a travelog on the Bushmen is shown, and students are asked to identify as many ethnocentric statements as they can. When asked to look for such statements, students are amazed at the blatant bias and the number of disparaging comments made so casually and even humorously about the Bushmen. This technique is especially worthwhile, I believe, in view of the magnitude of the sensational, non-ethnographically valid films that frequently assault us via movies and television.

5

Developing analytical ability is a third skill which needs emphasis. An analytical skill most directly relevant to anthropology is that of recognizing the unity and wholeness of culture. Students tend to react very superficially to traits in other cultures such as wife sharing, infanticide, shamanism, disinterest in formal, classroom types schools, etc. They must be encouraged, therefore, to describe these behaviors in the context of the specific culture, and to evaluate the functions of institutions or behaviors in relation to the entire system. It is informative in this situation to also isolate some aspects of our own culture (pep rally fight cheers, child beating, auto engines which talk on television etc.) and ask what conclusions other peoples might make about our culture if they weren't aware of the context or proportion of these behaviors.

At the beginning of this paper, I suggested that ethnographic studies of schools are one way of approaching the study of complex urban environments. I then went on to illustrate the use of anthropological concepts and methods in a public school curriculum. There are, of course other ways that anthropology could be utilized in relation to public schools.

For example, all public school teachers are, at least to some degree, exposed to students with different sub-cultural backgrounds in their classrooms. Teachers are generally not sufficiently aware of such subcultural differences, and they frequently are not aware that their own beliefs and behaviors can make learning for some of their students difficult or impossible because of subcultural differences. Anthropology could contribute a great deal to teacher training programs by communicating an awareness of the subcultural problems that teachers might encounter.

Most public school teachers (all elementary and most secondary teachers) examine cross-cultural materials in some way in their curriculums. Other cultures and sub-cultures are frequently not treated with respect and understanding, but rather are used as exotic examples to produce negative or sensational learning experiences. The understanding of culture itself is frequently limited to a fine arts, national costumes and native dance interpretation. Anthropologists, it seems to me, could make a more deliberate effort to extend an understanding of at least the basic culture concept.

Social studies teachers in particular need an awareness of anthropological concepts. History is culture change. Economic and political practices are not isolates, but parts of culture systems. Anthropological methods (descriptive objectivity, participant observation) and anthropological data (specific familiarity with other culture systems; awareness of alternative behavior patterns in relation to specific problems) would also be of great benefit to social studies teachers in general.

Public education, then, could gain a great deal at many levels from the discipline of anthropology, but before such gains can be made, anthropologists need to become more specifically aware of the ways they can most effectively make contributions. For example, schools could be more readily defined as valid fieldwork situations in relation to many areas of ethnographic research. In regard to

teacher training programs, anthropologists need to become aware of what teachers need to know in order to be more "disciplined" and effective in the classroom. They also need to discover more effective and efficient ways of selecting and communicating anthropological materials to those who could most clearly profit from them. In regard to curriculum, anthropologists might give greater attention to development projects and the sequencing of materials and skill complexities, in relation to primary secondary, and even university level curriculums.

Recently a number of anthropologists have begun to show greater interest in certain phases of education. I hope ~~that~~ this interest in education will not only continue, but ~~that~~ it will expand in some of the directions suggested in this paper.